

CHAPTER V

MACAULAY'S USE OF LITERATURE

STATE papers, memoirs, and the correspondence of kings and ministers are not the only materials which a modern historian requires. They must be supplemented by un-official documents of various kinds, but above all by the mass of printed matter, in prose and verse, in which the common ideas and the daily life of a nation find expression, and where small as well as great events are recorded.

No one realised this better than Macaulay ; he had the great advantage of dealing with a period for which materials of this kind were abundant and easily accessible, without being absolutely overwhelming in their bulk.

One of the characteristics of the History is the extent to which Macaulay uses contemporary newspapers.

No English historian before him had devoted much attention to them. Excepting S. R. Gardiner no later historian has so systematically employed this kind of authority.

'There is a noble, and, I suppose, unique Collection of the news-papers of William's reign in the British Museum/

says Macaulay. ' I have turned over/ he adds, ' every page of that Collection/ ' As a source of historical information,

newspapers are far more valuable for William's reign than for the reigns of Charles II or James II. In a well-known

passage in chapter iii Macaulay describes what news-papers were at the earlier date. Excepting

for the period
of the Popish Plot agitation, 1679-1681, they
were under

¹ V, 2544, n. (xxi).

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